



**Morning Alert - Monday, April 2, 2018**

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## **HEADLINES**

### **Morning news**

NHK gave top play to a report that China announced on Sunday that it will invoke retaliatory tariff measures against the U.S. starting today. TBS and TV Asahi led with reports on the first concert held by a South Korean art troupe in Pyongyang, which was attended by Kim Jong Un and his wife. NTV gave top play to a report that actor Kenji Sakaguchi announced that he will suspend his acting career indefinitely for medical reasons. Fuji TV reported that singer Yuzo Kayama's yacht caught fire on Sunday.

Major front-page items in national papers included the Okinawa prefectural government's moves to revoke the landfill permit for FRF construction, the Defense Ministry's plan to install mobile early-warning radar on the Ogasawara Islands, the start of U.S.-ROK military training, and the economic benefits generated by foreign tourists across Japan.

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **Japan exploring possibility of holding summit with North Korea**

Saturday morning's Asahi claimed that the Abe administration is looking into arranging a summit between Prime Minister Abe and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un based on the assessment that talks between the two leaders will be crucial to resolve the abduction issue amid the DPRK regime's sudden diplomatic overtures. According to several GOJ sources, the Kantei rather than MOFA is taking the lead in exploring the possibility, and an unnamed MOFA source reportedly stated: "We were recently instructed by the Kantei to informally make preparations since the administration is hoping to demonstrate progress in resolving the abduction issue." The paper wrote that although Japan appears to have been sidelined by North Korea's diplomatic overtures, some GOJ officials are reportedly cautious about the idea of "begging" North Korea to hold a bilateral summit.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Kono reportedly stated in a speech on Saturday that Japan should not rush to arrange a summit with North Korea. He also reportedly disclosed that the DPRK appears to be taking steps that could be construed as preparations for testing a nuclear device at its Yongbyon facility.

In a related item, Saturday morning's Yomiuri focused on remarks made at the Diet on Friday by FM Kono, who expressed hope for holding discussions with the U.S., China, South Korea, and other nations on how to verify North Korea's purported willingness to denuclearize. Mainichi separately took up a teleconference between Kono and Deputy Secretary of State Sullivan on Friday, during which they reportedly agreed to maintain close coordination ahead of the inter-Korean and U.S.-DPRK summits.

### **U.S. keeps South Korea's reconciliation with DPRK in check**

Saturday morning's Nikkei took up President Trump's remarks on Thursday suggesting that he might postpone finalizing the updated free trade pact with South Korea until an agreement on denuclearizing North Korea is reached. The daily speculated that the U.S. leader may be trying to prevent Seoul from becoming overly conciliatory toward its northern neighbor. Quoting an unnamed senior USG official as saying that South Korea is "the weakest link in the trilateral cooperation" between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, the article claimed that the Trump administration is worried that North Korea's denuclearization may become difficult if the Moon administration's conciliatory line gathers further momentum. While taking up the President's earlier remarks hinting at a withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea, the daily asserted that the U.S. leader is taking a coercive approach by linking trade with security and that this may jeopardize coordination between the two allies.

Monday's Yomiuri ran a similar story, speculating that President Trump may cut a deal with Kim Jong Un by agreeing to reduce the U.S. military presence in South Korea in exchange for denuclearization and the conclusion of a peace treaty. The paper conjectured that the President apparently feels that the U.S. has been shouldering a disproportionate financial burden in stationing troops there.

### **U.S., ROK begin joint training**

All Monday papers reported on the commencement on Sunday of the Foal Eagle joint drill between the U.S. and South Korean militaries, attributing the absence of U.S. aircraft carriers and strategic bombers from the annual training to emerging signs of reconciliation with North Korea. While noting that another joint exercise called Key Resolve will begin in mid-April, the papers said the two major exercises will probably last half as long as usual. Nikkei added that the U.S. and South Korea are apparently struggling to strike a balance between pressure and dialogue.

### **UN imposes additional sanctions on DPRK**

All Sunday papers reported from New York on a unanimous decision reached by a UN Security Council panel on adding to its sanctions list a total of 49 entities, vessels, and one individual suspected of smuggling prohibited items to and from North Korea at sea in violation of relevant resolutions. Asahi wrote that the international community imposed the sanctions to demonstrate its resolve to maintain pressure irrespective of the growing mood for reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. According to Mainichi, this is the largest round of sanctions imposed by the panel in terms of the number of entities targeted.

### **DPRK leader expresses willingness to send athletes to Tokyo Olympics**

All papers reported over the weekend on a meeting between Kim Jong Un and International Olympic Committee President Bach in Pyongyang on Friday, during which the North Korean leader promised to make efforts to enable DPRK athletes to take part in the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics and 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Yomiuri interpreted this statement as a gesture to highlight his conciliatory line ahead of the upcoming inter-Korean and U.S.-DPRK summits.

### **Chinese foreign minister to visit Japan**

Saturday morning's Yomiuri and Asahi reported that Chinese Foreign Minister Wang is likely to meet with Foreign Minister Kono in Tokyo on April 15 to lay the groundwork for a proposed trilateral summit with South Korea to be held in Tokyo after the Golden Week Holidays in May. Since the top Chinese diplomat sat in on the recent meeting between President Xi and DPRK leader Kim Jong Un, Kono is reportedly anxious to learn what was discussed.

### **Suga comments on U.S.-Japan summit**

Monday's Sankei and Nikkei took up remarks aired on a radio show on Sunday by Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, who commented on the upcoming summit between Prime Minister Abe and President Trump by saying: "The Japanese side will fully explain the importance of free trade." The government spokesman also projected that Abe will ask the President to bring up the abduction issue during his proposed meeting with DPRK leader Kim Jong Un.

### **U.S. Japan to resume exchanges between governors**

This morning's Asahi published a prominent story on a plan to hold a U.S.-Japan Governors' Association meeting in Japan this summer, explaining that the Abe administration has been proactive in convening the first meeting of the association in 23 years in a bid to obtain support from U.S. governors for Japan's contributions to local economies at a time when President Trump is taking a hard line on rectifying the bilateral trade imbalance. Tokyo is hoping that U.S. governors will become as friendly toward Japan as Vice President Pence has been since he was the governor of Indiana, where many Japanese companies have made large investments. While quoting an unnamed senior GOJ official as saying: "It is important to build relations at the grassroots level with local U.S. politicians who could become figures like Mr. Pence," the daily said Japan is lagging

behind Australia, Canada, Mexico, and China in forging close ties with the leaders of local governments in the U.S.

## **SECURITY**

### **Okinawa leader to revoke permit for landfill off Camp Schwab**

Monday's Yomiuri claimed that Okinawa Governor Onaga is inclined to rescind this summer the landfill permit that his predecessor issued in 2013 for the construction of the Futenma replacement facility off Camp Schwab in a bid to thwart the central government's plan this week to launch a new phase of the ongoing relocation work. The governor is expected to revoke the permit on the grounds that the central government has not taken appropriate measures to safeguard the environment there. The GOJ is likely to counter the rescindment by taking the matter to court. In December 2016, the Supreme Court ruled against the governor's attempt to "cancel" the same permit.

### **MSDF provided supplies to U.S. Navy on 17 occasions last year**

Saturday morning's Mainichi focused on the disclosure by the Defense Ministry on Friday that the MSDF provided the U.S. Navy with fuel, food, and other supplies on 17 different occasions in 2017 based on the updated ACSA that took effect a year ago. The supplies were reportedly offered upon request to U.S. vessels engaged in missile surveillance operations in the Sea of Japan. Pointing out that the SDF performed "asset protection" operations for the U.S. military twice last year based on the comprehensive security laws, the article said the "synchronization" of the two militaries has apparently been accelerating. Sunday's Nikkei filed a similar story.

### **U.S. plans to deploy F-35Cs in Iwakuni**

Sunday's Yomiuri reported on the disclosure by the CNFJ that F-35C stealth fighters will be deployed at MCAS Iwakuni in 2021 or later to replace some of the carrier-borne FA-18s. The daily speculated that the Navy variant of the Osprey tilt-rotor planes may also be deployed at Iwakuni to replace the C-2 transport planes. The FA-18s and C-2s were transferred to the Marine base recently from NAF Atsugi as part of U.S. force realignment.

In a related development, Sankei, Tokyo Shimbun, and Asahi wrote on Sunday that the relocation of the carrier-borne air squadrons from Atsugi to Iwakuni was officially completed on Friday, a few months earlier than originally scheduled. Sankei and Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the Marine base, which now hosts some 120 aircraft, is one of the largest U.S. air facilities in the Far East on a par with Kadena AB. Tokyo Shimbun added that some Iwakuni residents are concerned about the possibility of an increase in noise and accidents. Asahi said some of the transferred planes return to Atsugi occasionally, with the CNFJ reportedly issuing a statement saying that the carrier-borne airplanes will use Atsugi at irregular intervals for training and maintenance.

### **SDF planes to be equipped with sensors to enhance coordination with U.S. military**

Sunday's Mainichi reported that the Defense Ministry is considering equipping SDF ships and aircraft with the cooperative engagement capability (CEC) system, which significantly improves air and missile defense capabilities. The system will be installed on two MSDF Aegis warships to be built and four ASDF E-2D early warning planes. The ministry is reportedly aiming to operate the CEC system in coordination with the U.S. military to improve air defense capabilities.

### **Mobile radar to be installed on Ogasawara Islands**

Monday's Sankei wrote in its lead story that the Defense Ministry has decided to install mobile radar for the ASDF on the Ogasawara Islands in an attempt to fill the "air defense vacuum" caused by the absence of fixed early-warning radar in the area. The ministry has reportedly concluded that the swift installation of the radar will be critical to counter China's maritime advancement in the Western Pacific.

### **Okinawa finds discrepancies between Japanese, European SOFAs**

Saturday morning's Mainichi reported on the results of a fact-finding mission conducted by the Okinawa prefectural government on SOFAs in Germany and Italy, saying that since the U.S. military is subject to local laws in Europe in principle, the Okinawa government claims that "Japan is being put in a disadvantageous position." Based on the finding that Germany has amended its SOFA with the U.S. military three times, the Okinawa government reportedly plans to step up its calls for SOFA revision.

### **Defense chief refutes Kyoto University's dismissal of military research**

Saturday morning's Asahi took up press remarks on Friday by Defense Minister Onodera, who commented on the recent decision by Kyoto University not to conduct military research by saying: "It is important to make use of advanced civilian technology that can be applied to military technology." While mentioning the severe security environment surrounding Japan, the minister underscored the importance of promoting research on dual use technology because "Japan's advanced technological expertise constitutes the basis of national defense."

## **ECONOMY**

### **Japan careful about making "trade deal" with U.S.**

Sunday's Nikkei claimed that in pursuing the exemption of Japanese metals from U.S. tariffs, the Abe administration is cautious about cutting a deal like the one that South Korea sealed recently in the form of updating the KORUS FTA. The GOJ reportedly believes that when seeking exemption from the U.S. metal tariffs, Seoul made too many concessions in other trade areas. The daily conjectured that the GOJ is determined not to heed U.S. calls for FTA talks, quoting Deputy Prime Minister Aso as saying recently that Japan "will absolutely reject" such calls.

### **USTR report calls for Japan to open up farm market**

Saturday evening's Nikkei and Mainichi took up the annual trade barrier report released on Friday by the USTR, highlighting its call for Japan to further open its potato, beef, and other agricultural markets to U.S. products. The USG document also took issue with nontariff barriers in Japan's auto sector, such as GOJ-administered certification procedures. The dailies speculated that the Trump administration is likely to capitalize on the trade report to ratchet up pressure on Tokyo to rectify the trade imbalance.

## **POLITICS**

### **Abe's support rate continues to slide**

Today's Yomiuri front-paged the results of its latest public opinion poll that put support for the Abe cabinet at 42%, down six points from a month ago, and nonsupport at 50%, up 8 points. The approval rate dropped for two consecutive months apparently because of strong public dissatisfaction with the administration's handling of the document-tampering scandal involving the Finance Ministry. Abe's popularity reportedly plunged especially among voters aged 18 to 39. However, Kyodo's latest survey put support for the Abe administration at 42%, up 3.7 points from last month and nonsupport at 47.5%, down 0.7 points. According to the Yomiuri survey, some 62% said the Abe administration should be "cautious" in seeking a summit between Prime Minister Abe and DPRK leader Kim Jong Un.

### **Casinos could be opened in up to three locations nationwide**

Saturday morning's Mainichi wrote that the ruling coalition has forged a rough consensus on the outline of the proposed legislation on implementing "integrated resorts" featuring casinos, saying that it will allow gambling facilities to be established in up to three locations across Japan initially. The ruling coalition, however, has also agreed that this quantitative regulation can be reviewed seven years after the first casino is opened.

